

Representative Dawn Morrell

25th Legislative District



Dear Friends,

This year’s short 60-day session finished on time, and I’m happy be home and back at work in our Puyallup District office.

It was a session of savings and productivity. Our \$291 million supplemental budget is less than one percent of our overall budget and saves over \$850 million for future needs. But even with these savings, we were able to make smart investments that will benefit our community and state for a long time. You’ll see highlights inside.

This is my last newsletter of the year, so let me take this opportunity to say that it is an honor and pleasure to serve you in the Legislature! Please remember that I serve you all year long; so please feel free to give me a call or send me a note with your ideas, questions or suggestions. I’d love to hear from you. Let’s keep in touch!

Warmly,



Dawn Morrell

2008 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Long-term care that really does care



I’m very proud lawmakers passed my “Aging in place” reform to create a falls prevention program and offer much-needed support—including respite care—to family caregivers. Family and other informal caregivers are unsung heroes of long-term care. But they need help so that they can help senior citizens and others with disabilities to “age in place” at home or nearby settings instead of in institutions.

Why am I so proud of this law? As the Senior Citizens Lobby, AARP Washington, State Council on Aging and Eldercare Alliance put it in a rare joint endorsement of the law:

“The ‘Aging in Place’ long term care bill, HB2668, is a high level and urgent priority for each of our four organizations. As we age, Washingtonians want to remain at home and in our own communities. This bill will prevent disease and harmful injuries that lead to hospitalizations and subsequent nursing home admissions while at the same time bolstering support for informal (unpaid) family care giving.”

A big THANK YOU to Washington’s senior citizens for helping me to pass this bill!

If you’d like information on how to plan for long-term care, just call Pierce County’s Aging and Disability Resource Center at 253-798-4600 or 1-800-562-0332.

Session Briefs ...

WASL Reform: Parents, teachers and students will like changes we made to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) that shorten the elementary/middle WASL tests (except writing), and replaces the high school math WASL with end-of-course assessments. This is a good start toward responding to concerns that teachers and parents have raised about the WASL.

Better educating for careers is the goal of new policies and incentives to help school districts align career and technical education with high-demand job opportunities and college programs. This will also help ensure that course credits are transferrable.

2008 transportation budget. I voted “No” on the 2008 supplemental transportation budget. It has some good points, but I think the budget needed more funding for important Pierce County projects, such as congestion-relief on Highway 167.

Long-term care insurance you can count on

“Rep. Dawn Morrell showed tremendous leadership in working to adopt these national Long Term Care Insurance standards.”

— Washington Insurance Commissioner, Mike Kreidler

People need more consumer protections and peace of mind when buying long-term care insurance. That’s why I took the lead in passing a model long-term care insurance law recommended by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners.

The law will help people protect their assets—including their homes—and offers important consumer protections, such as inflation and privacy protections. It also requires insurers to fully disclose costs and consumer rights. We need people to take more personal responsibility for their long-term care needs. Creating better choices and protections for long-term care insurance will help.

Clamping down on metal theft: Part 2

The law I wrote last year to clamp down on metal theft has been very successful. But the Puyallup Police Department asked me to propose another law to specifically target the theft of catalytic converters from vehicles.

Puyallup Police Sgt. Robert Thompson gave compelling testimony to lawmakers about thieves ripping catalytic converters from cars and trucks—sometimes even flipping cars over to steal the converters and sell them for quick cash!

Thanks to support from the Washington State Patrol, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs and Independent Business Association, we passed a strong law that prevents scrap metal businesses from paying cash for catalytic converters and requires them to keep strict records of who is selling the devices. I salute the Puyallup police for all they do to keep us safe and for helping me to pass this good law.

Nurse staffing reform becomes law!

With a stroke of Gov. Chris Gre- goire’s pen, my nurse staffing bill became law and Washington became the first state in the na- tion to require all hospitals to work with nurses to create safe staffing levels. The law reflects an his- toric agreement reached between nurses and hospitals.

The patient safety reform requires every hospital to have nurse staffing committees where hospital of- ficials and nurses work together to determine safe and appropriate staffing levels for every hospital unit and shift, based on patient needs. Staffing plans must consider such factors as the number of patients, the severity of their conditions and the experience of nursing person- nel. Hospital finances will also be taken into account. The plans must be publicly posted with the actual nurse staffing and made available to anyone who wishes to see them.

As a critical care nurse at Good Samaritan Hospital in Puyallup, I can as- sure you this historic reform will be great news for patients, nurses *and* hospitals, and it will save lives.



Local Farms - Healthy Kids initiative

One of this year’s best “win-win” ideas will improve children’s health and give a needed boost to family farms. The “Local Farms, Healthy Kids Initiative” will put schools in touch with local farms and reform contracting rules to help schools buy locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables. This is good for kids, who eat more healthy fruits and veg- etables when the produce is fresh and tasty, and it’s good for family farms. Helping farms and farming families is important to preserving part of our character as a state.



Protecting your cell-phone privacy

A 2005 law I wrote prevents wireless companies from publishing private cell-phone numbers without the customer’s permission. This year, I updated the law to prevent data-harvesting companies from publishing your cell-hone number without permission. The last thing you need is to be flooded with cell phone calls—that *you* pay for—because your cell number was publi- cized without your consent!

The updated law also requires reverse phone number search services to allow you to perform a search for free to see if your cell-phone num- ber is in the directory. If you see your cell-phone number there when it shouldn’t be, you can demand that it be removed.



Working for affordable health insurance

Skyrocketing health insurance costs are causing terrible hardships across the nation. The hardest hit are people who buy their own insur- ance, because they don’t have employer-provided coverage. Premiums in this “individual market” are soaring by as much as 20 percent a year as insurers rack up record profits and surpluses.

To restore balance, we gave the state Insurance Commissioner the pow- er to demand justification for proposed premium increases *and reject premium hikes that are unreasonable*. Washington families deserve this protection.

We also fine-tuned plans for the “Health Insurance Partnership” I spon- sored last year. It will let small businesses, employees and the state pool resources to provide affordable health coverage to lower-income employees beginning next year. This new public-private partnership will help businesses, workers *and* taxpayers cope with rising insurance costs.



Dawn with grandchildren Ava and Gus on Children’s Day in the House of Representatives



New investments in our communities

“Rep. Morrell made a compelling case for the 25th District projects in our budget proposal.”

*— House Capital Budget Chair
Bill Fromhold*

The Legislature passed a lean capital construction budget this year, but I’m happy to report our Pierce County communities fared very well:

- A \$3.1 million investment will launch planning for a new Pierce County Skills Center on the site of the old Safeway at 160th and Canyon Road East in Bethel. When complete, the 84,000 square foot skills center will help youth from 10 local school districts learn cutting-edge skills for 21st Century jobs.
- A \$300,000 upgrade to the Mount Rainier Lahar Warning System will make sure sirens are working and able to warn people in the Puyallup River Valley of imminent danger from a cata- strophic mud flow.
- Pierce County got \$291,000 to help purchase development rights to Terry’s Berries and pre- serve this beautiful 21-acre open space for ag- ricultural purposes “in perpetuity.” Over 2,000 school kids visit Terry’s Berries each year to learn about farming and conservation.
- 28 partner agencies—including the Puyallup, Tacoma, Edgewood and Fife police depart- ments—stressed the need for a Mobile Com- mand Center to coordinate a wide range of emergency responses. We provided \$330,000 to meet this public safety need.



Terry’s Berries is a great community asset

Thank you veterans!

“Unpaid leave for military spouses to be together ...and an extra 7 days of annual paid military leave for public employees are dramatic breakthroughs ...”

*— Major General Timothy J. Lowenberg,
The Adjutant General, Washington National Guard*

I’m deeply honored that last Veterans’ Day I was named the 2007 Legislator of the Year by the Governor’s Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee. Although I’m proud of the laws I’ve passed for veterans, I believe in my heart that this award truly belongs to Pierce County’s active duty military and veterans. They’ve provided ideas, inspiration and leadership for military families and veter- ans across Washington.

This year, we enacted a law suggested by Puyallup resident Bryan Grenon, a family man who is also a Sergeant with the Seattle Police Department and a Major in the Washington Army National Guard. Major Grenon told me he and troops must often use their own vacation time for military training, because military leave has not kept pace with the much-expanded duties of citizen soldiers. I asked Bryan to share his story with the Legislature. He did, and we increased the num- ber of military leave-days allowed to state and local employees from 15 to 21. Well done, Major Grenon!

Another new change provides that, in times of military conflict, spouses are entitled to up to 15 days of unpaid leave before their military spouse is deployed, or is on leave from deployment. We also authorized a special license plate for the parents of service members who have died while serving our country.

Please remember our outstanding Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs has a one- stop number to get needed services to veterans: 1-800-562-2308.